

The democracies of the western hemisphere and of Europe preserved for a long time the principles belonging to their origin in the English and French revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the protection of the independence of the individual against the power of the state, and the protection of the rights of the middle-class against those of the classes privileged in the old regime. But this epoch has definitely passed.

Respect for the dignity of the human personality was the moral basis for democracy. This conviction gave it strength in its fight against feudalism. It armed the citizens and disarmed the members of the upper classes before they even started their defense. Is this conviction still alive? What has modern psychology to say about human dignity and freedom? You may open a textbook of psychology and find that the first chapter deals with the question, "What is man?" You may be surprised or you may not be surprised by the answer given there. The answer is: "Man is a mass of protoplasm." Therefore, human life and the human world have to be explained in the last instance as reactions of protoplasm. This interpretation leaves no room for freedom or dignity, because the reactions of protoplasm demand only mechanical, impersonal schemes, and they can best be controlled by political organizations which do not waste their time with such trifles as dignity. It is not too difficult to prove the mistakes and basic errors of the philosophy represented by this kind of modern psychology. The frightening fact is that in spite of its obvious weakness and queerness, this psychology is accepted almost everywhere throughout the country and is taught with minor variations at almost all universities. There is no doubt that the ground out of which democracy has grown has completely changed—but democracy can exist only in a special kind of ground. The fate of democracy will not be decided on the battlefields alone. It is also threatened from within, not only by its open or secret enemies, but still more so by those who praise it, unaware that they themselves have already cut it from its roots. The fate of democracy will ultimately be decided by the convictions and philosophy of the citizens of the democratic countries.

We cannot turn backward; history will not repeat itself. A new ground will be prepared. Democratic freedom will survive only if there is a complete change in the attitude of the individual towards the state and the whole: a change from claims to duties. Solidarity and respect for the rights of others cannot be based on emotions and instincts, but can only be understood as the obligation of one part of the whole to another part. Because this relation is not a natural instinct it has to be developed, taught and learned. The enormous dimensions of modern states have made it difficult for many people to understand their own true function and their own role as parts of such an abstract whole. This relationship can best be learned within a community of small dimensions where the single person can understand the needs of the whole, where he may help to satisfy these needs, and where he remains visible in all his actions.